

ACAPTAININ THE RANKS

Synopsis of
A CAPTAIN IN THE RANKS.
By George Cary Eggleston.

Captain Guilford Duncan, C. S. A., takes part in the last fight, at Appomattox. He leaves the army, and determines to go to Cairo, Ill. Although well educated and a lawyer, Captain is without family or money. He works his passage to Cairo, where he meets Captain Hallam, a modern captain of industry, hires Capt. Duncan, who advances in his employer's estimation. He saves Hallam's coal fleet from destruction by a storm. Hallam proposes to make Duncan a partner in his enterprises. The young man becomes a force for good among the young men of Cairo. Barbara Verne runs the boarding house in which Captain takes his meals.

(Continued from last week.)

CHAPTER XI.

THE person who had originated and who conducted Mrs. Deming's boarding house—famous for its fare—was, in fact, not Mrs. Deming at all. That good lady would pretty certainly have scored a failure if she had tried actively to manage such an establishment. She had never in her life known necessity for work of any kind or acquired the least skill in its doing. She had been bred in luxury and had never known any other way of living until a few months before Guilford Duncan went to take his meals at what was known as her "table."

She had lived in a spacious and sumptuously furnished suburban house near an eastern city until two years or so before the time of this story.

When Barbara Verne, her only sister's child, was born and orphaned within a single day the aunt had adopted her quite as a matter of course.

No sooner had Barbara ceased to be an infant in arms than she began to manifest strong and peculiar traits of character. Even as a little child she was wondered at as "so queer—so old fashioned, don't you know?"

She had a healthy child's love for her dolls, and, though the persons around her had not enough clearness of vision to see that she was fruitfully and creatively imaginative in her peculiar way, her dolls' nursery was full of wonderful stories, known only to herself and the dolls. Every doll there had a personality, a history and a character of its own. Barbara was the intimate of them all—the confidential friend and companion, who listened to their imagined recitals of griefs and joys with a sympathetic soul, counseled them in a prematurely old way, chided them gently but firmly for their mistakes, commended good conduct whenever she discovered it in them and almost mercilessly rebuked such shortcomings as common sense should have spared them.

But notwithstanding the child's imaginative gift she was intensely practical in a quick witted way that often astonished those about her. She had an eager desire to learn domestic arts, and her peculiar conscientiousness in the doing of whatever she undertook to do usually resulted in a skill superior to that of her teachers.

She loved to haunt the kitchen, where her courtesy won even the cantankerous cook for a friend, and from her the girl learned so much of her art that the cook could teach her no more. In the laundry the good natured Irish woman who presided over that department of household economy gave her

always so warm a welcome that the child came to think of the faithful woman as one of her choicest friends. Working with her over a little ironing board, Barbara quickly became expert in all the finer and more delicate operations of her art.

So Barbara educated herself upon lines which she deemed womanly. There was no art of kitchen or laundry or sewing room in which, as she grew older, she did not make herself the superior of the highly paid servitors whose skill her aunt employed to perform such functions. For explanation she said only:

"I am to be a woman. I must know how to do all womanly things. If I don't know all that better than the servants do I must always be dependent upon servants. I think that would be humiliating."

In the same spirit she took up such school studies as she deemed proper to her womanhood and only such. But she gave to each a degree of conscience that always surprised her teachers. She had not the gift of learning easily, but her devotion was such that she learned thoroughly in spite of all the difficulties.

When she was only a dozen years old or so the little woman took upon herself the duties of housekeeper in her aunt's mansion and kept order there in a way that won something like local fame for herself. It was not art or intuition or rule that inspired her. It was temperance.

Absolute cleanliness was to her a religion, and the servant who fell in the remotest way short of that was quickly made to think of herself as an unregenerate sinner. Absolute neatness was another requirement which the budding little woman insisted upon with relentless persistence. Then again it seemed to her that there was no possible excuse for any cooking short of the best.

A few years later the aunt's husband met with misfortune and went west. Presently he died, and Barbara's aunt was widowed and impoverished at one and the same time.

Then it was that Barbara rose in the strength of her practical wisdom and met the emergency with all of the character that she had built up. Her aunt was helpless, so Barbara took matters into her own hands. She was nearly twenty years old then, and her capacities as a housekeeper had ripened through use until she felt modestly confident of herself. "Besides," she argued, "there is nobody else to do things if I don't."

She persuaded her aunt to take a little house with a big sunny dining room, and there she offered to the young bachelors of the town—in her aunt's name—better meals than they could get at the pretentious hotel, and she charged them scarcely more than half the hotel rate.

One by one the best of the young men in the town were drawn to Barbara's table until the dining room was filled. After that any one who wished to join the circle must put his name upon a waiting list and bide his time till there should be a vacancy, for Barbara held that it would be unjust to crowd present boarders in order to take new ones, and she hated all injustice. The waiting list was always long; for the fame of Barbara's table was great.

Really it was her own skill that made her table famous. She hired a cook, of course, after her little business became prosperous, and sometimes for a brief while she trusted to the cook's skill. Then her conscience beset her because the breakfasts and dinners and suppers were not prepared in that perfection which alone could satisfy this conscientious little woman's soul. "You see, it isn't honest, aunty," she would say in explanation whenever she returned to the kitchen and gave personal attention to every detail. "We are charging these young gentlemen for their meals, and it seems to me dishonest if we give them less than

the best that we can. They come to us because they have heard that we serve the best meals that can be had in Cairo. How mean and wrong it would be for us to trade upon that reputation and give them meals of an inferior quality! I simply can't get a cook who will do things at their best, and so I must do most of the cooking myself, and then I'll know it is well done."

She hired a "neat handed Phyllis" in a cambric gown—which Barbara insisted must be fresh and clean every day—to wait upon the table. She hired a handy negro boy to wash dishes, scrub and prepare vegetables under her own direction. She did all the more important part of the cooking herself, and the negro boy Bob simply worshipped the girl whom he always addressed as "Little Missie."

CHAPTER XII.

THERE were boys in Cairo, of course, and equally of course some of them were bad. The bad ones used to do things to annoy Robert's "Little Missie." Robert proceeded to thrash them upon every proper occasion, and he did it with a thoroughness that left nothing to be desired thereafter. When Robert had thrashed a boy that boy went to bed for repairs. And he was apt to be reticent as to where and how he had received his bruises. That was because Robert always ended a flat encounter with a warning.

"If you don't want a double dose o' dis here you'll perhaps obtain 'um mentionin' de name o' de culled gentleman wot gib it ter you."

And the victim usually "obtained." If he didn't it was presently the worse for him.

Robert had been born in the south. He had lived there till his fourteenth year. He had there imbibed certain doctrines of pugacious chivalry. There had been bred in his bone the conviction that it was every strong man's duty to protect every woman and to punish any disrespect shown to her.

It was through one of Robert's battles that Guilford Duncan became acquainted with his hostess, Barbara Verne. That young woman very rarely appeared in the dining room, and so the young Virginian had scarcely more than met her when one morning on his way to breakfast he came upon a battle between Robert—"free man of color," as he loved to call himself—and three Cairo boys who had waylaid him in order to avenge the punishment he had given a few days before to one of them who had playfully hurled half a brick through Barbara's kitchen window.

When Duncan came upon the battle, he saw Robert was backed up against a dead wall. Two of his adversaries had gone to grass, and the third was hesitating to prosecute the attack alone. Seeing his hesitation, Bob—great strategist that he was—instantly decided to convert his successful defense into a successful offense without delay. Quitting his defensive position against the wall, he rushed upon his remaining adversary, who promptly retreated without waiting to reckon upon the casualties.

Then Bob jumped upon his other and slowly rising antagonists, knocked them down again and hurriedly excited of each a "wish I may die" promise to let "Little Missie" alone from that day forth.

"Good for you, Bob!" exclaimed young Duncan. "But we'll make that promise more binding. Help me, and I'll take these young ruffians before Judge Gross and compel them to give bonds for good behavior."

It didn't take long to arraign the culprits, prove that they had thrown a brickbat through Barbara's window, and secure an order of the court requiring them to give considerable bonds for good behavior in future.

This brought their parents into court and subjected them to a good deal of annoyance and trouble. They had to give bonds, and, more troublesome still, they had to control their boys. Then again the newspapers published the facts.

In this way Guilford Duncan multiplied his enemies in Cairo. But he had a deep seated conviction that it is worth a man's while to make enemies by doing right. In this matter he had done only right. He had invoked the law for the protection of a woman, and he had completely accomplished his purpose. He cared nothing for the revillings that ensued, but Ober, the man of brains and character who edited the principal newspaper of the town, took the matter up and made much of it.

"This town is barbaric," he wrote in his editorial columns. "It owes sincere thanks to Mr. Guilford Duncan for teaching it that law is supreme; that it is to the law we should appeal in every case of wrongdoing. The parents of the young hoodlums who have been bound over to keep the peace have long needed this lesson. This newspaper rejoices that the lesson has been given in so emphatic and conspicuous a manner. It congratulates its young fellow citizen, Mr. Duncan, upon the quality of his citizenship and upon the results of its activity."

The entire talk of the little city was of Duncan's activity in hailing the hoodlum sons of highly "respectable" parents before a magistrate as a consequence of their battle with a "nigger." On that subject tongues wagged busily pro and con. The friends of the aggrieved parents who had been forced to give bonds for the good behavior of their ill regulated offspring indignantly made a "race issue" of a matter which had nothing whatever to do with race prejudice.

They could not understand how a southerner and an ex-Confederate sol-

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dier could thus have taken the part of a "nigger" against "respectable white boys." Others who were clamorous for the "rights of the negro" rejoiced in Duncan as a convert to their doctrine.

Both were wrong, of course. Neither in the remotest way recognized the real impulses of his act—namely, the impulse to protect a woman and the im-

and held out her hand. As he arose deferentially to greet her, taking her proffered hand in his, the girl said:

"I've come to thank you, Mr. Duncan. It was very kind of you—to protect Robert, you know—and me. I'm Barbara Verne. Thank you ever so much."

As she made her little speech the brave but timid girl looked him in the eyes with the embarrassed front of a child set to do a duty mingled with the calm composure of a woman who knows and cherishes the dignity of her womanhood.

Duncan protested that no thanks were due him for doing his simple duty, and after a word or two more the girl quitted the room, while Duncan, gallantly bowing, held the door open for her.

The little interview lasted for less than two minutes, and not an unnecessary word was spoken on either side, yet it seemed to Duncan an event of consequence, as indeed it proved to be.

Something in the girl's voice or manner, or something in her eyes, or something in her grace of movement, her bearing, her mingled simplicity and dignity, or something in all these combined, had mightily impressed him. He had seen little of women in any intimate way, and, while he honored womanhood and deferred to it, as every sound souled man must, he had thought himself quite indifferent to women in their individual personality. But somehow he could not feel so with Barbara Verne, and later in the evening he scourged himself for his folly in continuing to think of her to the interruption of the reading he had set himself to do.

"I will call upon her and become really acquainted with her," he said to himself. "That will cure me of this strange and utterly absurd fascination. Of course the girl must be commonplace in the main, and when I come to realize that, the glamour will fade away."

(Continued next Sunday)

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